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The Union and Harmony of Reaſon, Morality, and Revealed Religion.

A

SERMON

Preached before the

Univerſity of *Oxford*,

At St. *MARY*'s

On *Sunday*, *February* 27. 1736-7.

The FOURTH EDITION, Reviſed, and Corrected.

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STEPH. NIBLETT,

Vice-Can. *Oxon.*

April 30. 1737.

JOHN XIV. 1.

——*Ye believe in God, believe alſo in Me.*

THESE remarkable words of our Saviour contain as cloſe an argument, and as pathetical an exhortation as can be conceived. We may infer from them in general terms, that as there is a plain gradation from NATURAL to REVEALED Religion, and as there is a real *union* and *harmony* between them, therefore every honeſt impartial mind, is, as it were, favourably pre-diſpoſed and induced by the *former*, ſincerely to believe and practiſe the *latter*. ——And indeed CHRISTIANITY, ſuppoſing it free from all mixtures of human invention, ſuppoſing it rightly ſtated and truly explained, is queſtionleſs the moſt reaſonable thing in the world. Nothing poſſibly can be conceived more worthy of God on the one hand, or more beneficial to Man on the other. *Chriſtianity* in this ſenſe is ſo far from claſhing with the common dictates of *reaſon* and *morality*, that on the contrary it mutually illuſtrates them and enforces them.

To explain *theſe* points effectually and not ſuperficially: to give tolerable light and ſatiſ-

faction to the hearer: to harmonize things that have been so differently treated, and so variously represented—is an undertaking only to be justified by its extraordinary use and importance.

I. *First* then, in order to lay a deep and firm foundation, I shall attempt to prove, that there is and ought to be a real union and harmony betwixt *Reason* and *Christianity:* and that no argument can be drawn from the *former* (rightly explained and duly limited) in dis-favour of the *latter.*

II. *Secondly*, I shall consider the *Law* of *Nature*, and of course *Natural Religion* in the same manner.

III. *Thirdly* and *Lastly*, after reconciling these great important Points, I shall endeavour to give you a clear idea of the *reasonableness*, the *propriety*, the *expediency* and *advantages* of Divine Revelation;——Concluding with a few general useful *remarks* taken from the force and nature of the foregoing discourse.

I. *First* then, I am to prove, that there is and ought to be a real union and harmony betwixt *Reason* and *Christianity:* and that no argument can be drawn from the *former*, (rightly explained and duly limited) in dis-favour of the *latter.*

And here, if writers at first setting out would distinguish justly, they ought to consider *Reason* in three senses:

The Reason of God: which is in other words, his eternal invariable necessary Omniscience and rectitude of acting;

The

The Reaſon of Things: which ſo far as morality is concerned, is *that* difference which reſults from the unchangeable eternal nature of right and wrong, good and evil;

And the Reaſon of Man; which is that *faculty* whereby every particular perſon compares ideas or things, and judges thereby of their agreement or diſagreement, truth or falſhood.

Right attention to theſe diſtinctions is of the greateſt importance: 'Tis in the *laſt* ſenſe only that *Reaſon* is concerned in the preſent debate; and even here *Reaſon* muſt be conſidered, not as an uniform abſtract metaphyſical faculty, but as a *perſonal* thing: actually exerted, variouſly imparted originally by the author of nature, and much altered afterwards by improvement or neglect.

'Tis alſo worth obſerving that the perſons called *Deiſts* generally confound theſe *two* firſt ſorts of *Reaſon* with the *third*, when they declaim ſo perpetually on its abſolute perfection, its unalterable unerring nature, &c.

Such in particular is the conduct of a late admired Writer *(a)*, whoſe name I ſhall forbear to mention, ſince I cannot mention it without *reproach*. Firſt he tells us, *that Reaſon is an invariable principle, a perfect unerring rule*; Which in one ſenſe is certainly true in relation to the divine reaſon, and the general abſtract reaſon and nature of things; Next he tells us, *that Reaſon* to us, as men, is, and muſt be the ſame *invariable principle, the ſame perfect unerring rule*; Which in another ſenſe is not true, for human Reaſon, [by

(a) Author of Chriſtianity as old as the Creation.

which I mean that Reaſon which the human mind exerts,] is, by the nature of man often fallible, more or leſs perfect as circumſtances vary, and always proportionable to the abilities of the agent. From which ſort of arguing, (the common cuſtom of our author,) 'tis plain that Reaſon ſignifies one thing in one propoſition, and another thing in another, than which nothing can be more illogical, or more diſhoneſt. Hence therefore nothing can be drawn either concluſive or cogent enough to ſet *reaſon* at variance with *revelation* and thereby ſuperſede it.

Others have roundly told us in general terms, *that Reaſon is and muſt be a ſufficient guide in matters of religion:* Which without doubt is ſtrictly true in an explained and limited ſenſe. But if this aſſertion be laid down as a ſelf-evident truth without due exceptions and reſtrictions, then 'tis certain, from the very drift and intent of the authors, (tho' the conſequence be only implied) that the thing intended is to render all divine revelation needleſs, inaſmuch as inconſiſtent with God's wiſdom to give us a *ſecond* guide, after a *firſt* guide which is truly ſufficient.

The true ſtate of the caſe is briefly thus. It muſt always be conſidered whether the above-mentioned propoſition be ſpoken of *Heathens*, or ſpoken of *Chriſtians*.

If it be ſpoken of *Heathens*, then *Reaſon*, ſuppoſing it duly exerted and attended to, muſt be a ſufficient guide in matters of religion. It is preciſely *that* rule which God himſelf has thought fit to give them, in order to direct their judgment with relation to truth and falſhood, right

and

and wrong. If it be inadequate to ſuch purpoſes, then there muſt be a defect either in God's *power* or *will:* in ſhort, either in his *natural*, or *moral* capacity.——The poor creatures are inſincerely and unjuſtly dealt by;---They are not truly accountable and puniſhable for their errors and their ſins.

If the above-mentioned propoſition be ſpoken of *Chriſtians*, then reaſon is a ſufficient guide in a more reſtrained and exceptive ſenſe. It is the guide that conducts us to divine revelation: It is a ſufficient competent judge of the evidence, the propriety, the expediency, the advantages of it: It examines its grounds and reaſonableneſs carefully and ſincerely: conſequently it leads us naturally into the belief of *Chriſtianity*, and then modeſtly ſubmits to it. So that *Reaſon* upon the whole, is the groundwork of all faith, and the teſt of all truth; and tho' it may receive ſupernatural aids and advantages from God's goodneſs and favour, (in compliance with the inattention, frailty, and corruption of the agent to whom it belongs,) yet ſtill in the main 'tis in many ſenſes a ſufficient guide, ſince it leads us to the path where we cannot *err on the right hand or the left*, and ſince it judges previouſly of the ſtraitneſs and goodneſs of that path or road to everlaſting happineſs.

Reaſon with theſe limitations, (which certainly are of ſuch conſequence as to prevent the higheſt preſumption and hereſy) may truly and ſafely be ſaid to be a ſufficient guide in matters of religion.

We

We are told further, "*That the* Reaſons *of things are a rule to God himſelf, and therefore* are *and muſt be a ſufficient rule to us*".

I ſhall examine both theſe propoſitions, which are generally touched upon too ſlightly, with all the care and caution I can.

And firſt, to make the *reaſons of things a rule and law to God, antecedent to him and independent of him*, is the moſt abſtruſe, the moſt fallacious, the moſt dangerous part of Deiſm that ever was invented. For whenever any *Notion*, (like this of our adverſaries at preſent) implies at firſt ſight great perplexity, if not contradiction: and when the plain common ſenſe of our minds can never cordially be reconciled to it; then 'tis certain, either that ſome unobſerved *Error* lurks at the bottom; or that ſeveral truths and circumſtances lie concealed: part, or all of which, (ſuppoſing them clearly perceived and known) muſt explain, or alter the caſe.

Theſe conſiderations ought to teach our adverſaries diffidence and humility: But as ſuch arguments have been known to fail, I ſhall not content my ſelf with applying only to their modeſty.

As God is the *firſt* cauſe, ſo of courſe he is *antecedent* to *things* themſelves, (nay even to ideas) and of conſequence to the *relations* and *reaſons* of things. *Theſe* likewiſe, as they ſubſiſt by him and derive their exiſtence from him, cannot poſſibly be *independent* of him. Hence it follows that *they* are not eternally, unchangeably, neceſſarily what they are, as they ſubſiſt in the things themſelves, (whoſe properties are the re-

reverſe of ſuch qualities) but as they proceed from God.

Further, at the ſame time that God decreed things ſhould exiſt, he eſtabliſhed likewiſe their relations, fitneſſes and reaſons: not from any *arbitrary* appointment, as we ſhall demonſtrate hereafter, but from his own internal invariable rectitude.——As theſe relations, &c. came originally from God, ſo of courſe they can no ways be a *rule* or *law* to him: 'Tis true he cannot act contrary to *them*: but that ariſes from hence, becauſe he cannot contradict *himſelf* and his *own truth*; But in ſhort, nothing, properly ſpeaking, can be a *rule* or *law* to God:---The deſign of a *law* is to govern and reſtrain from doing *wrong*: The deſign of a *rule* is to rectify and keep from deviating into *error*: Both *which*, are infinitely remote from divine perfection.

The fallacy which induced our adverſaries to eſtabliſh a certain *imaginary* rule or law, *prior* to God, and even independent of Him, was apparently This: They fancied the Deity himſelf, except reſtrained by ſome external obligation, muſt be an *arbitrary* Being; little conſidering, that *infinite Power* itſelf cannot be arbitrary, when the oppoſite Scale is kept exactly equal by *infinite Wiſdom*. In frail fallible Man (and there lies the miſtake) meer inclination and pleaſure are always placed in contradiſtinction to right motives and reaſon: But in God the caſe is directly otherwiſe: divine rectitude neceſſarily excludes even from omnipotence itſelf, All that's contrary to unerring truth, and invariable equity.

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As to the second proposition, having shewn the falshood of the first, and having destroyed all consequences that can be drawn from thence, I shall only consider it simply in it self. Doubtless the *reasons of things* are a real *rule* and *law* to man: To assert otherwise would be little less than profane scepticism and madness. All I contend for is, That they are not a rule and law in *such* a sense as to supersede, in any degree, *divine revelation*---Were Man a creature purely spiritual: abstracted from the body and bodily passions: corrupted neither by others, nor himself: and perfect as he first came from the hands of his Maker;---Then the Scheme of our adversaries, I must confess, would be highly plausible and conclusive. But such a rule of action at present, supposing Men better and wiser than they really are, can no ways render Revelation useless. The investigation of most moral truths is too difficult, and too operose for the bulk of mankind; Consequently, as men see more or less evidence, their obligation to comply with such truths is weaker or stronger; If they see *no* evidence, (which too often happens in unattentive or gross minds) then the obligation is nothing at all.---But the *Morality* which *Revelation* teaches lies open and level to all capacities. It has a plainness and a precision which no philosophy can reach. *It is a highway*, as *Isaiah* propheçyed of it, *and the way-faring man, tho' a fool, shall not err therein.* Ch. 35. 8. It is not to be collected piece-meal, *a line here and a line there*, from the several philosophers of different ages: Nor is it built upon such half visible half vanishing

niſhing principles as can only be made out by the fineſt underſtandings; But it goes directly to the *heart*, as well as the *mind*; and convinces us very ſignally in this, as well as other caſes, that God is *no reſpecter of perſons*: but that he has *revealed* the knowledge of his laws *liberally* to all of us, and *hath upbraided none*. Jam. 1. 5. ----This plain ſelf-evident *morality* is enforced at the ſame time with the ſtrongeſt *Motives* and *Sanctions* that can be conceived. Far therefore from claſhing with the obligations of reaſon, it on the contrary explains them with greater clearneſs, and urges them with greater force.

This will appear yet ſtronger, if we conſider the many inabilities of the human mind; the many poſſibilities of our being miſtaken; the corruption of our wills; the frailty of our natures; the precipitancy of our paſſions; and the temptations of the age!

Thus have I ſhewn from fact and argument, that Reaſon, duly limited, and the reaſons of things rightly explained, can in no ſenſe oppoſe, much leſs evacuate divine Revelation.

Nor am I conſcious of laying any reſtrictions upon Reaſon more than I ought. Angry invectives againſt it are juſt as dangerous as extravagant commendations in behalf of it. Ignorant and ſuperſtitious men vainly and weakly triumph in a religion which proceeds not upon rational principles, and which 'tis impoſſible to make out! But 'tis the great glory of *Chriſtianity* as we profeſs it, to be the friend of reaſon: To be able to ſay unto *Wiſdom, thou art my Siſter*. *Prov.* 7. 4. In ſhort, Reaſon is the prerogative

and ſhining ornament of our nature: the guide that leads us through *error*, to the propoſed end of our journey, *happineſs!* Its power is ſo extraordinary, that a man who thinks truly, cannot poſſibly act againſt it: Nothing can blind it, but ſome headſtrong paſſion or determined perverſeneſs; Which amounts to no more (if uſed as an argument againſt *it* in general) than if a pilot ſhould reſolve to embark in a dangerous ſea, and then wilfully ſhut his eyes. For, to confeſs the truth, *reaſon* is not ſo much hurt by the fall of man, as the *paſſions* are: Like a Prince unjuſtly depoſed, it is ſtill capable of governing honeſtly and ſucceſsfully, if it could be reſtored to *that* Throne which our irregular appetites, (and the many blindneſſes and depravations attending ſuch appetites) have uſurped from it. ----And therefore God himſelf graciouſly refers his rectitude and our obliquity to *this* teſt of human reaſon: *Houſe of Iſrael, is not my way equal, are not your ways unequal?* Ezek. 18. 25. Elſewhere he ſays, *come now and let us reaſon together.* Iſ. 1. 18. *O my people, what have I done unto thee, or wherein have I wearied thee? Teſtify againſt me.* Mal. 6. 3. Our Saviour himſelf is extremely angry with the Jews for not exerting their reaſon: *Why of your ſelves*, ſays he, *judge ye not what is right?* Luke 12. 57. St. *John* pre-ſuppoſes the conſcience or reaſon of man to form the ſame notion of right and wrong which God does; (the ſame in kind, though infinitely diſtant both in clearneſs, and manner of perception:) *Beloved*, ſays he, *if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.* 1 Joh. 3. 21.

3. 21. *I ſpeak unto wiſe men*, ſays St. *Paul*, (and that upon a very myſterious occaſion) *judge ye what I ſay.* 1 Cor. 10. 15. I may add further, that when the ſame Apoſtle (who had the gift of tongues and of miracles) forced *Felix* to tremble, 'tis remarkable, that he applied himſelf to neither one or the other of the ſupernatural powers above-mentioned, but that he *reaſoned* only. *Acts* 24. 25 *.

Yet ſtill we muſt remember, that reaſon, as 'tis the faculty of a finite being, is always of a *limited*, and often of a *fallible* nature. To graſp at things, either abſolutely beyond the power of our comprehenſion, (and which for that reaſon are not eſſential to human happineſs, if we rightly conſider the divine goodneſs:) Or to graſp at things which God has reſerved as prerogatives to himſelf; is only in other words, if I may preſume to vary a Scripture phraſe, *ſeizing the Kingdom of Heaven by force. Seek not the things that are too hard for thee, nor ſearch the things that are above thy ſtrength: But what is commanded thee, think thereon with reverence; for it is not needful for thee to ſee with thine eye the things that are ſecret.* Eccluſ. 3, 21, 22.

II. Having thus rightly ſtated, explained, and limited the powers of human Reaſon, (ſhowing at the ſame time its perfect harmony and conſiſtency with Revelation,) I ſhall now in the ſecond place conſider the *Law* of *Nature*, and of courſe *Natural Religion*, in the ſame manner.

* See alſo, Theſ. 5. 21. Pet. 3. 15. 1 John 4. 1.

The Law of Nature *abſolutely* and *in general*, ſignifies thoſe eternal immutable truths concerning good and evil, right and wrong, which reſult from the nature of things, as thoſe things are ſuppoſed to affect and obligate rational agents.---This Law in its full extent and perfection can only be truly known by the ſupreme Being.

The Law of Nature *relatively*, and with regard to the preſent debate, ſignifies ſo much preciſely, (and no more) of thoſe eternal immutable truths, as each man ſees or finds out for himſelf.

This diſtinction ſub-divides itſelf farther: Firſt, it ſignifies thoſe more delicate and complex parts of the Law of Nature, which the beſt moraliſts and fineſt reaſoners have diſcovered: Secondly, it ſignifies thoſe common and more obvious truths, which, except a man reſolves wilfully to contradict reaſon, are as eaſily known and diſtinguiſhed, as light or darkneſs, pleaſure or pain.

God only, who created the things themſelves, who arranged them afterwards with inexpreſſible beauty, variety, and harmony: who foreſaw their ſeveral tendencies and relations, together with all poſſible circumſtances and contingencies: He alone, author, diſpoſer, director of all things, ſees, (without variableneſs, or the leaſt ſhade of confuſion or obſcurity,) all thoſe ſeveral truths, infinite in number, and univerſal in extent, which make up what we call *abſolutely* the Law of Nature.

Man,

Man, on the other hand, whose knowledge is finite, imperfect, and liable to mistake: whose knowledge depends partly on his own care and neglect: upon living in such an age, or upon receiving such an education: and partly upon that greater or lesser degree of Genius with which he was born: (and which doubtless is the free gift and goodness of God;) Man, I say, considered in this light, takes in just so much of the Law of Nature *relatively* and personally speaking, as the above-mentioned circumstances give him leave.

So that though the rule itself be universal and general, yet since a person may see more or less of it; and since *to himself* that person *standeth or falleth*; therefore the *rule* as to him must be a *relative particular* thing.

The Law of Nature thus stated in itself, and considered with this reference to man, is so far from opposing revelation *à priori*, that it rather calls for it and requires it: Especially if we take human corruption and degeneracy into the state of the question.

Yet the Deists have all argued here unfairly and inconclusively: Especially the falsly celebrated Author I lately mentioned. He continually shifts the scene between these several acceptations of the Law of Nature: He concludes from one to the other indiscriminately, without any explanation or restriction; And thereby gives us much better proofs of his dexterity than of his honesty. 'Twere to be wished he had attended a little more carefully to *that* reasoning, and *that* sincerity, which he labours so much to be thought

thought maſter of; Elſe it may appear, I (ſpeak with charity and truth) that he only cried them up, as hypocrites do virtue, the better to conceal the want of them.

Therefore, as I obſerved before, a diſtinction certainly ought to be made between the Law of Nature *abſolutely, and objectively, as matter of knowledge in general*; and between the Law of Nature *relatively, and perſonally, as matter of duty in particular*; Or in other words, between the *Law of Nature*, which contains all poſſible truth and rightneſs of acting; and between the *Light of Nature*, which contains only *that* portion of moral truth which each man ſees, or finds out for himſelf.

In ſhort, if we intend to judge truly and ſafely in the preſent caſe, 'tis neceſſary to conſider not only the Law of Nature in itſelf, but the *manner* alſo whereby *that* Law affects mankind; [Almoſt every thing in this world is *relative*, and muſt be conſidered in that view as well as others.] Hence we ſhall find that the truths of the Law of Nature with reſpect to man, are *perſonal* things. The perception is various, according as the evidence of them is more or leſs. As well might two men have the ſame proportions and features, as the ſame preciſe degree of apprehenſion and knowledge. Thus in lower inſtances, the harmony of muſick and colouring, the powers of thought and language, ſtrike one perſon far more forcibly than another. The reaſons whereby the mind is affected, are eternal and univerſal: antecedent to our conſideration, and independent of it; But the affection itſelf is both excited

cited and perceived, in proportion to a man's own natural genius; in proportion likewise to his care and application: together with the instructions and good taste he has received from others.

After these distinctions and explanations, what becomes of the boasted argument *à priori?* "The "Law of Nature is absolutely perfect, therefore "external revelation can add nothing to it". &c.

In short, 'tis agreed on all hands, that men by natural conscience and the essential differences of things may know in the main what is good and evil. Some may proceed much further, and argue with great force and clearness upon the divine being and attributes, the works of creation and providence, the probable hopes of a future state, and God's mercy towards penitent sinners. Yet still with confidence I affirm, no *subsidiary* system ought to be rejected, which, (besides being proved to come from God,) confirms these hopes, strengthens these motives, advances and adds to these reasonings.----Nor would any *set* of men, after the least right thought and instruction, differ from me in this opinion, if they opposed revelation merely out of a mistaken principle: and not out of singularity, youthful levity, hatred to a particular order of men, and a vain groundless belief that the Law of Nature favours *some* pleasures which revelation does not. Take away these impediments, and the work is done. ----And as to *others*, the few sincere advocates of natural religion, let them only go their own lengths, and we are secure of them. An honest discharge of all moral duties and virtues

tues is the beſt pre-diſpoſition that can be, towards receiving the Goſpel. *Ye Believe in God*, ſays Chriſt, *believe alſo in Me!* The great Apoſtle likewiſe expreſsly aſſures us, that *the Spirit of God*, that is, divine revelation, *beareth witneſs* exactly *with our Spirit*, namely human reaſon. *Rom.* 8. 16.

This, I flatter myſelf, will be fully verified, if men will only ſeriouſly conſider what has been ſaid, and purſue it in their own minds. Hence, when reaſon, morality, and revelation are harmonized, I will venture to promiſe them a few very ſignal advantages. Religion, literally ſpeaking, will be *built upon a rock*; It will be ever uniform and conſiſtent with itſelf; We ſhall not be obliged to exalt one truth at the expence of another; Nor compelled *to ſet aſunder* thoſe things *which God hath conjoined!*

III. Thus have I ſhown that reaſon, morality and revealed religion, are all perfectly at union with each other: Which leads me naturally to my third general head, the *reaſonableneſs* and *propriety*; the *expediency* and *advantages* of *divine Revelation.*

The *reaſonableneſs* and *propriety* of divine revelation, appear plainly from the union and harmony above-mentioned. For if the ſeveral *Syſtems* of reaſon, morality, and revelation, are no ways incompatible with each other; and if ſuch *interpoſition* as we here ſpeak of, is in no ſenſe inconſiſtent with the divine nature and attributes; I would aſk what oppoſite ſuppoſable argument

can

can be assigned against God's assisting frail and lapsed creatures? Or why ought we to reject such assistance, especially when 'tis so agreeable to natural virtue, and so perfective of it? --- Please to observe the conduct of the heathens, and behold a full proof of what I here assert. Most of them believed in revelation of some sort or other; Both *Plato* and *Tully* speak plainly of its *propriety* and *credibility*; and as this belief met with reception from all orders of men, (which could never have happened, if the thing itself was not probable and credible,) they therefore made it the true, or pretended foundation of all law and government whatsoever. I only say this to prove that revelation is perfectly reconcilable to the common principles of reason; As for *Christian* revelation, 'tis so agreable to the justice and goodness of God, and so consistent with the wants, and natural expectations of men, that nothing, (of those things that depend upon moral certainty) can possibly be more self-evident.

I will add further, that as the truth of things allowed a revelation to be possible, so the state of man actually required it.

The doubts, the uncertainties, the vain-glorious disputations, which we see amongst the great masters of wit and reason in *Rome* and *Athens* themselves, plainly show us that the most enlightened *Antients* could perform but little. I will say nothing of the carelessness, inattention, prejudices, superstition, vicious customs, lusts, ignorance, and corruption of the vulgar. I will only observe, that the Philosophers them-

ſelves were ignorant of many great and important points. They hardly deduced any truth without fear and uncertainty; Many things they explained falſly, or placed on a wrong foundation; None of them had courage, moſt of them had not benevolence enough to reform mankind, and embrace the dangers conſequent thereon. Laſtly, which was an inſuperable difficulty, they wanted proper ſanctions and authority from God.

Let a good-natured Chriſtian only read the dialogues of *Tully*, and the laſt diſcourſe of *Socrates*, and I am convinced he will be moſt tenderly and ſenſibly affected, to ſee ſuch miſ-givings, uncertainties, and miſtakes in a ſincere earneſt endeavour after truth. And yet *theſe*, as well as the other *Antients*, (to ſay the leaſt of them,) had inclinations to ſeek for truth, and abilities to find it equal to ours. Judge therefore whence this difference ariſes, and make the inference your ſelves. ——I might ſay a great deal more on the preſent argument, but as moſt writers have exhauſted it: I ſhall only obſerve by the way; *That* when perſons educated in the Chriſtian faith, make extraordinary panegyricks upon the *Law of Nature*, and at the ſame time ſpeak very coldly, and negligently about the *Law of the Goſpel*, 'Tis much to be feared, (ſince the *One* confeſſedly improves and enforces the *Other*,) that they only honour the *former* in pretence, and have always a ſecret ill-will to the *latter*. *It is not for our turn*, ſay they to themſelves, like the licentious men in the book of *Wiſdom*: *It is clean contrary to our doings: It is made*

made to reprove our thoughts, it is grievous unto us even to behold; The life it prescribes is not like other mens lives, its ways are of another fashion. Ch. 12. 12, 14.

Having thus shewn the great *reasonableness* and *propriety* of Revelation, I come now to the *expediency* and *advantages* of it.

And first, it gives us, (so far at least as our finite understandings are capable,) a full, satisfactory, and compleat character of God. This by the way, is a very signal advantage to human morality, which endeavours, in all proper cases, as much as possible, (though with infinite disproportion) to resemble the rectitude and goodness of the supreme Being; So far therefore as Revelation informs us better upon these heads, so far likewise it better enables us more exactly to copy divine perfection.

In proportion as we have clearer notions of the Deity, we have likewise clearer notions of our own *relative* State: As also of our original, our depravation, and our means of reconcilement. ——For though *Repentance*, strictly speaking, is a natural duty, and though men had great and assured hopes of mercy and favour after sincere submission and returning to God, yet still ('till the fulness of revelation took place) they knew not *certainly* their real state and condition here; they knew not the true source and reason of human degeneracy; and consequently, they knew not the means of being restored, nor the terms of reconciliation.

Some indeed have attempted to prove, that man in a state of nature, could not possibly form

to himſelf any moral aſſurance, that God would vouchſafe to pardon ſin, even after repentance. But here I think they have loſt ground by endeavouring to puſh the victory too far. *Reaſon* gives us great, nay perhaps certain aſſurances, that God will forgive a frail erring creature after due repentance and ſubmiſſion; But *Revelation* graciouſly proceeds much further: It points out the very method whereby God has brought about this reconciliation, (matter of new incitement to devotion, of new obligation, and thankfulneſs:) It likewiſe tells us that God will not only pardon ſin, (which queſtionleſs is *all* in ſtrict juſtice he is obliged to do,) but that he will likewiſe confer upon us *immortality*.

This doubtleſs is his meer voluntary gift and goodneſs in *Chriſt*: It is what we have no real title and claim to, even though we were unerring and ſinleſs creatures. Repentance, ſtrictly ſpeaking, is not at all matter of *merit*, but matter of *duty*; It is what a reaſonable creature is obliged by the nature of reaſon to perform. And therefore if God, of his ſuperabundant infinite goodneſs, is pleaſed to beſtow *immortality* upon us inſtead of *bare forgiveneſs*, certainly we ought to expreſs all the gratitude, thankfulneſs, and obedience that can be conceived. Our merit and goodneſs according to what reaſon and revealed religion tell us, can in no ſenſe *extend to him*, Pſ. 16. 2. Gen. 32. 10. 2 Cor. 3. 5. a man cannot *profit his Maker*; Job 22. 2. Were we to bear him the ſtrongeſt and moſt grateful affection that can be thought of, yet This at beſt is nothing more than ſtrict duty and juſtice: *We*

can

can only love him, becauſe he firſt loved us!--Therefore upon the whole, *Immortality* is matter of meer free bounty and mercy: and of courſe cannot poſſibly be diſcovered otherwiſe, than by the gracious promiſe and declaration of the Giver. He alone expreſsly aſſures us, *that to him who overcometh* in Chriſt Jeſus, *ſhall be given to eat of this Tree of Life which is in the midſt of the Paradiſe of God.* Rev. 2. 7. Ch. 22. 2, 4.

Revelation likewiſe has given the higheſt improvement to morality that can be conceived, by adding the external *Sanctions* of *hope* and *fear*, and urging them upon mens minds with extraordinary ſtrength and cogency.

Theſe *Sanctions* in any light give us a high idea of God's affection towards us: Either if we look upon *them* as expreſs *commentaries* in *ſo many words*, upon what was before implied in the nature of things: Or if we conſider them, as ſubſidiary *motives* to virtue, built upon the *paſſions*, in order to quicken reaſon to embrace happineſs and ſalvation. Every way, they give weight and authority to God's laws, vigour and activity to man's obedience, and in ſhort are the main arguments, and vital principle of the Goſpel.

The *Rewards* of Chriſtianity in particular, notwithſtanding what ſome *affected* moraliſts may ſay, are moſt juſtly and happily calculated by the great judge and knower of the heart. Tho' *they* apply themſelves to the *paſſions*, yet they do not derogate in any manner from the powers and force of human reaſon: but rather, [at leaſt if we judge from effects,] add to it, and awaken it,

it. Being eſſential to virtue, or natural conſequences from virtue, they imply no ſelfiſh mercenary temper in the perſon to whom they are propoſed; and as to the far greater part of mankind, (which does not pretend to a conſtant diſpaſſionate right judgment on all occaſions and emergencies,) they are doubtleſs the great guard and ſupport of frail human nature. Talk as long as we pleaſe, men are made up of *paſſions* as well as *reaſon:* reaſon is the *guide*, but *paſſions* are the *motive* of action: in proportion as they are the more *perceptive ſenſitive* principle, they are the more properly applied to. Upon the whole, I will be bold to ſay, (without any diſparagement to un-influenced reaſon and diſintereſted virtue;) that the *paſſions* of *hope* and *fear*, together with the effects of them, obedience, gratitude, devotion, repentance, will in the end conduce moſt towards carrying us to heaven. ---So that whoever invented this philoſophical kind of *Antinomianiſm* which I am now confuting, (and which if I remember right is as old as *Epicurus*,) did not thoroughly underſtand the mixt nature of our *reaſon* and *paſſions*. He acted *inſincerely* in the cauſe of virtue, if not *weakly*. ---At preſent likewiſe, the perfection of Chriſtianity does not conſiſt in preſcribing a ſyſtem proper *to angels*, but proper to *men*.

Revelation may be looked upon in another view, as highly perfective of natural religion. It not only urges all moral conſiderations more ſtrongly and forcibly on our conſciences, but it explains them alſo more clearly, more diſtinctly, and in a more perſonal applicable manner.

It

It is compendious, and yet methodical: ſublime, yet uſeful and intelligible in the higheſt degree of perfection. It conducts us to our journey's end, by the ſhorteſt, plaineſt, ſecureſt path that can be; *where the ſteps are not ſtraitened, and where he that runneth, ſtumbleth not.* Prov. 4. 12.

As it adds new Sanctions built upon the paſſions, ſo it adds *new motives* built upon arguments purely *evangelical*. We are infinitely more deſirous to embrace virtue and deſpiſe temporary pleaſures, when we conſider the *eternal reward laid up for us in heaven.* 1 Cor. 2. 9. 2 Cor. 4. 17. Hebr. 5. 9. Jam. 1. 12. 1 Pet. 1. 4. We find uncommon improvement in our moral character, when we contemplate the life and actions of our bleſſed Saviour. We are doubly induced to love and ſerve all mankind, (even our enemies,) when we remember that God freely forgave us, and that Chriſt voluntarily died for us. So that hence ariſes a ſet of *Virtues*, *new* in themſelves, or at leaſt taught in a *new* manner, and upon a *new* principle. I may add alſo ſeveral others ariſing from the ſame ſource, and built upon the ſame foundation. Such as *ſelf-denial*, *charity*, *humility*; *meekneſs*, *patience*, *reſignation*; *ſuffering for the ſake of religion*; and above all *evangelical righteouſneſs*, or *chriſtian Perfection.*

Some of theſe are the *only* virtues that can ſupport us under extraordinary misfortunes and pains, trying afflictions and perſecutions. Meer human reaſon, (ſuppoſing a deiſt capable of exerting it coolly in ſuch caſes) will afford but little conſolation, in compariſon with the aſſured hope, and ſtedfaſt faith of a Chriſtian. View

the

the *former*, (in his fallen, uncomfortable, diſpirited ſituation) and, according to a moſt beautiful expreſſive picture in the book of *Job*, *it is all darkneſs with him and the ſhadow of death*, nay *the very light is as darkneſs*. Ch. 11. 23. View the *latter*, and though you ſee an equal weight laid upon him, yet you ſee a foundation able to ſupport it: *He is perplexed, but not in deſpair: he is caſt down, but not deſtroyed*; *As having nothing; and yet poſſeſſing all things*. 2 Cor. 4. 8, 9. 2 Cor. 6. 10.

I ſhall add, laſtly, That there is a ſort of *Spirituality* in the Goſpel, which is not to be found in natural religion.----It adds *heat* to the *light* of reaſon.----By the very nature of that newneſs of life which it requires, it inſpires us with warmer notions, it draws us more affectionately to God, and gives us a fore-taſte and *pre-ſentiment* of our ſpiritual ſtate afterwards in heaven.

Is it not ſurpriſing then, that men ſhould reject a *revelation*, attended with ſo many great and ſignal advantages; and *which* in general, is as much God's free gift and goodneſs to them, as ſuperior ſtrength, health, and underſtanding? ----God has thought fit graciouſly to talk to them, and they, vainly, contemptuouſly, unthankfully diſpute the nature of his voice, and the poſſibility of the thing!----Of courſe they render themſelves inexcuſable, in proportion as they think lightly of a Religion eminently good, excellent, and well intended.

1. From what has been ſaid it follows *Firſt*, in general, That there is and muſt be a *real neceſſary union* between reaſon, morality and revelation.---

All

All *truth* proceeds from *one* original, which is God: We ſee the properties of truth as clearly as the attributes of God: and are as much convinced of the unity of the one as of the other.

For, (except we can ſuppoſe things to be what they are not) *truth* conſidered as ſuch, muſt be uniform and conſiſtent: It muſt have the ſame properties; the ſame tendency more or leſs; It may differ in degree, or in ſuch manner as *means* differ from the *end*; But it never can differ in nature and quality. *As wiſdom is juſtified of all her children*, ſo ſhe is juſtified in all her diſpenſations.

Therefore if it be once proved that Scripture came from God, it follows neceſſarily and unanſwerably, that the truth of reaſon, and the truth of revelation, are both, (though not of the ſame kind) of the ſame nature: Both lead to the ſame end: And the ſecond voice of God is as true and as worthy of him, as the firſt.

It follows further, even to a demonſtration, that wherever the common notions of morality oppoſe revealed religion, or wherever revealed religion oppoſes them, there our own particular ideas of *one* or the *other* are certainly falſe. It happens here as in calculations, A man may miſtake in caſting up two numbers, and in the ſeveral truths conſequent thereon: and yet the two numbers really terminate in ſome certain invariable produce, and muſt have ſuch and ſuch properties, and relations to each other.

And now let the world judge, what a wretched piece of work thoſe men have undertaken, who have attempted to make union and harmony it-

 ſelf,

ſelf, matter of controverſy and variance. Each party, vainly ſtriving to do *reaſon*, or *God* ſervice, has torn up religion by the very roots; For to *ſeperate* in the preſent caſe is to *deſtroy!* ---As well the great Author of nature might lead frail fallible creatures into endleſs doubts and errors, as give them *one* ſort of *knowledge*, or *one* ſort of *religion*, to contradict *another*.

2. *Secondly*, to reject a revelation, which has ſuch *cogent*, I might ſay *abſolute* proofs as ours, is the higheſt inſtance of ingratitude, unreaſonableneſs, and inexcuſableneſs that can be conceived. For why ſhould a perſon reject a *ſyſtem*, which confeſſedly gives new light to moral truth, and new force to moral motives, if it did not privately claſh with his own practiſe, or require greater ſtrictneſs and perfection than he cares for attaining? ---At leaſt, (to ſpeak as charitably and favourably as we can) ſuch a perſon is highly careleſs, and prejudiced: cauſeleſsly ſuſpicious of a certain order of men, or extremely deſirous of being thought a *wit*, and a determined *laugher* by profeſſion.

Hence it happens, that he either ſees not, or attends not to the evidence of revealed religion. He looks upon it before-hand as a ſworn enemy to his practiſe; Inſtead of being commonly careful, he is ſo violently ſuſpicious, that he believes, and truſts no one at all; His wit and imagination are always upon the watch, and not his reaſon and ſincerity; Freedom of *thought* is what he boaſts of, but freedom of *life* is what he aims at; and though he ſets up for a great and intrepid genius, (ſuperior to ſome certain obli-

obligations which he calls ignorant, and enthuſiaſtical) yet in the end he fully verifies an extraordinary obſervation of *Solomon*'s on the like occaſion, *they that promiſed to drive away terrors and troubles from the ſick ſoul, were ſick themſelves of a fear worthy to be laughed at.* Wiſd. 17. 8.

3. However *Thirdly*, 'tis a very unkind and unſucceſsful method, to treat theſe unfortunate perſons with ſharp ſatire and contempt. In the nature of the thing, 'tis true, we cannot deſcribe unreaſonableneſs like theirs, without ſome keenneſs and ſeverity; yet ſtill I affirm we ought to open the wound, with as careful and gentle a hand as may be. For ſuch is the falſe pride and frailty of men, that they would rather be thought *wicked* than be painted *ridiculous:* And therefore the firſt ſtep towards converting them, is to aſſure them, that we truly eſteem them, and are concerned for their ſouls.

I am well aware of certain paſſages in the New Teſtament which ſeem to countenance very ſevere language againſt *unbelievers*: But as we know not the perſonal circumſtances and aggravations of theſe particular caſes*; (And as upon a nearer view, almoſt half the texts uſually cited upon this occaſion, relate rather to *immorality* †, than what is commonly called *hereſy:*) we ought certainly to guide ourſelves by a ſtronger and greater number of paſſages on the other ſide of the queſtion **; By the mild and amiable con-

* Tit. 3. 10. 2 Joh. 7. 9, 10. 1 Tim. 1. 20. 1 Cor. 16. 22.
† Gal 5. 20. Tit. 1. 11. Ch. 3. 11.
** Mat. 7. 1. &c. Rom. 14. 4, 10. Gal. 6. 1. Phil. 4. 5. Col. 3. 14. 2 Tim. 2. 24, 25. Tit. 3. 2, 3. Jam. 3. 13. Ch. 4. 12. 1 Joh. 2. 12. 1 Joh. 4. 20. 2 Theſ. 3. 15.

conduct of our Saviour himself ††; and by the very nature of the gospel, whose end is universal peace and reconcilement in earth and heaven. ---Nothing can compel the mind but *truth:* Nothing can pre-dispose it favourably, but *kindness:* And therefore for a plain reason, the ridicule, the satire, *the wrath of man cannot work the righteousness of God.* Jam. 1. 20.

4. *Fourthly* and *Lastly*, let us endeavour *thus* to promote religion in our discourse and writings, and especially in forming and instructing the young tender minds of *this place.* Let us first lay a firm and deep foundation in reason and morality, and then let us add the beautiful super-structure of Christianity. Let us remember that the *kingdom* of truth *cannot be divided against itself*; and that each of the above-mentioned systems magnified in such a manner as to exclude the other, *cannot stand as it is not of God.* ---'Tis true, We are set apart *here*, for the promotion of every art and science, which serves to delight or instruct us: To soften our cares, or refine our pleasures; Yet still we must deeply and seriously consider, that our great and principal duty consists, in understanding rightly the obligations of Morality and Christianity, and explaining them accordingly. Every thing else is only the luxuriance and garniture of the mind, The ornament rather than the duty of life: Not our business, but our amusement, Not our studies, but our idlenesses; no ways capable, strictly speaking, either of charming, or satisfying a reasonable immortal soul.

In

†† Mat. 12. 18, 19, 20. Ch. 11. 29. Luke 9. 55. Joh. 13. 35.

In ſhort, 'tis from *this place* that the Church is to receive its greateſt ſupport, and infidelity, by a natural conſequence, its ſtrongeſt oppoſition. And indeed with pleaſure I flatter my ſelf that DEISM, (in ſpite of all its ſucceſs and encouragement) never will conquer this ſacred Aſylum, this ſure retreat of knowledge and religion. In ſtrict truth it never can, if a certain noted obſervation be true; " A little learning " makes men irreligious, a great deal conſtantly " preſerves them, under a ſober temperate vene- " ration for God".

Let us only place Chriſtianity upon the reaſonable foundation above-mentioned, and promote it in that amiable benevolent manner I have recommended to you, and doubtleſs we ſhall be enabled, either to avert that unmerciful malice which purſues us at preſent, or ſupport it *like men. Wherefore my beloved Brethren, be ye ſtedfaſt, unmoveable: always abounding in the work of the Lord, foraſmuch as ye know that your labour will not be in vain in the Lord.* 1 Cor. 15. 58.

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